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## RECENT THEOLOGICAL LITERATURE

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### MEDIAEVAL JEWISH PHILOSOPHY

Some years ago the Catholic party in the Prussian diet complained of discrimination against Catholics in appointments to chairs at the universities. One of their grievances was that a chair of philosophy in the University of Breslau, which, on the ground of a provision dating back to the time when the Jesuits had control of Silesia, was reserved to the Catholics, had not been filled by a conforming Catholic. The minister of education, explaining the *modus operandi* by which one chair of philosophy was to be filled by a Catholic and one by a Protestant, could not suppress a smile, and the house heartily joined in the humor of the occasion. The humor would also apply to Jewish philosophy, unless we accept it as a technical term, which, rightly or not, has been accepted in literature, and we understand by it—what it really is—apologetics of Judaism.

In this respect Professor Husik has done a meritorious work,<sup>1</sup> by which he has earned the gratitude of all people interested in the history of religion and for which he may claim the credit due to a pioneer. We have had so far a number of excellent works dealing with individual philosophic authors, or with a special branch of the subject, but none which covered the whole field and is satisfactory from a scientific point of view. The work of Neumark, which aims at completeness, has in two volumes only covered part of the subject. Those of Spiegel in German and of Bernfeld in Hebrew are neither satisfactory nor accessible to an English-reading public.

Husik begins his work with Isaac Israeli, who lived in the ninth and tenth centuries, and leads it down to Joseph Albo, who lived in the fifteenth century. In a closing chapter he gives a few more remarks on some authors of the fifteenth century who may be included among the writers on philosophy, dismissing all later attempts along this line with a general statement about the degeneracy of Judaism that has not developed any Jewish philosophy. In this the reviewer must differ with the author. The works of Moses Mendelssohn, of Mordecai Gumpel

<sup>1</sup> *A History of Mediaeval Jewish Philosophy*. By Isaac Husik. New York: Macmillan, 1916. i+462 pages. \$3.00.

Schnaber, of Samuel Hirsch, and of his antipode, Samson Raphael Hirsch, may be poor attempts at an apology for Judaism, but they deserve historically a place next to their mediaeval predecessors.

The reviewer has to admit that the problems treated in the literature lucidly presented in Mr. Husik's book have merely a historic interest to him. Terms like "active and passive intellect," "vegetative, animal and rational soul," the theory of the four elements and of the spheres surrounding this earth like the skins of an onion, have been so completely abandoned since the Copernican system has been generally accepted, and since the theory of evolution took the place of the old notion of creation, that it requires the self-abnegation of the genuine scholar to wade through such arguments and to present them in the clear style of which Mr. Husik has a right to be proud. The subject possesses in some respects an actual interest. Solomon Ibn Gabirol, who built up his system on neo-Platonic ideas, was known to the mediaeval world as "Avicebron," and was supposed to be an Arabic philosopher. Some of his leading ideas were appropriated by Thomas Aquinas, whom Pope Leo XIII recommended as the philosopher who had definitely settled the world's problems. Maimonides, the greatest Jewish theologian of the Middle Ages, was studied by the Christian scholastic philosophers and had a great influence on Albertus Magnus. These and some others, principally Abraham Ibn Ezra, as well as some Cabbalists, whose works Mr. Husik passes by, had their influence on Spinoza, who studied them during the formative period of his life and was through them guided beyond the confines of strictly Jewish thought, laying the cornerstone of modern philosophy.

I would not subscribe to Mr. Husik's final statement that the Jews were in no way influenced by the Renaissance movement. We have, in the sixteenth century, two men who contributed very prominently to the critical study of Old Testament literature. Elijah Levita (1468-1549), a German, was the first to point to the fact that the vowel points in the Hebrew text of the Old Testament are late inventions. Azariah Dei Rossi (1514-78), an Italian, boldly demonstrated that the rabbinic views of science and history are not authoritative, and by this fact assisted in revising the blind belief in the stories of the origin of the Septuagint, and of the Aramaic version of the Pentateuch, which up to his time were blindly accepted. Neither of the two men gave us a presentation of Judaism as a system of thought, but both helped considerably to emancipate their co-religionists, and the scientific world at large, from blind submission to ecclesiastic authority. Mr. Husik, including

Abraham Ibn Ezra among the philosophers, although he never wrote a systematic work on the subject, ought not to have overlooked the work of these men, nor the work of a most remarkable and original character like M. L. Malbim (1809-79), a Polish rabbi, whose exegetical work contains, in spite of the anachronism which it represents, a large number of brilliant apologetic ideas. Abraham Ibn Ezra gives us in his Penta-teuch commentary (Deut. 20:6), in spite of the obscurity by which he tries to shield himself against heresy-hunters, a clear idea that he does not accept the dogma of predestination in its full severity. Similarly his discussion of the sin of Moses, a problem treated very extensively in rabbinic literature (Num. 20:12), has a distinctly pantheistic tone and may have exercised considerable influence on Spinoza. The space assigned to this review does not permit going into details, and therefore any criticism of individual points would create the impression that the reviewer can say little or no good of the book, while he wishes to state most emphatically that the author has made a lasting contribution of great value to an important branch of the science of religion.

Having expressed this conviction, I do not apprehend any misunderstanding when I point to the perseverance of an old legend in Mr. Husik's book. He speaks of the spiritual life among the Spanish Jews that began with Moses Ben Enoch, who was ransomed by the congregation of Cordova. This story, which is found as early as the twelfth century, is one of the legends on which a comparative Jewish folklorist might engage in profitable research. It is an old folklore theme in Jewish historical literature that God will never abandon his people, and if their home is destroyed in one place he will provide another.

This, however, is not to the point. Jewish philosophy—to adopt this term—presents two aspects. One has its classic expounder in Maimonides, the rationalist, in whose opinion neither the Bible nor the vast rabbinic literature can contain anything which the highest intelligence will not accept. The other is the mystic attitude, chiefly represented by Judah Halevi, who looks upon Israel as God's favorite child, destined to be a model community for the benefit of the whole world. Maimonides—to make this idea clear—will see in the sacrificial cult a compromise with the weakness of human nature that requires ostentatious ceremonies, while Judah Halevi sees in it a mystic agency, somewhat like our electrotherapeutics. Both present an immense progress over the old rabbinic literature, which took everything for granted, magnifying all miracles and accepting the biblical precepts as something which is unquestionably the will of God. We may smile today at

some of the puerile attempts of rationalizing the old Jewish beliefs and practices, but they represent, after all, an emancipation from blind beliefs and a progress of humanity.

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### THE DEFENSE OF GOD AND OTHER PROBLEMS

A great contrast is offered to the Christian thinker in the discussion of the same or at least closely related themes by Principal Forsyth and President King. The former<sup>1</sup> is particularly concerned to justify God in view of the horror of the *sin* of the world which has culminated in the present war. The awfulness of the war and all that it implies weighs upon him from the preface to the last page of his book. President King, writing before the United States entered war, and much farther from its frightfulness, gives special attention in the first part of his book<sup>2</sup> to the *suffering* or *pain* which afflicts the world, although the problem of sin is not neglected.

In judging a theodicy it is well to consider at the outset what is wanted in a theodicy. It is that such considerations should be presented to men as should make it reasonable for them to believe that God is *good* in view of particular difficulties in the way of such belief. Forsyth undertakes this task in two lines of argument. In the first he shows that this war has arisen as a result of false ideas of God, and that doubt as to God's goodness, in view of the war, follows these same false ideas. In the second he undertakes to give us the certainty that his idea of God is the true one, by pointing out what he regards as the supreme action of God in demonstrating his holiness and goodness, in the cross of Christ.

The great error in recent thought about God, according to the principal of Hackney College, is that we have desired him to be on our side, instead of being concerned ourselves about being on his side. Our religion has been anthropocentric instead of theocentric. The explanation of Germany's action is that she has come to view the ultimate power of the universe as immanent and pantheistic, rather than as transcendental and personal, and that this has led to the worship of craft and power at the expense of humanity and every ethical principle.

<sup>1</sup> *The Justification of God; Lectures for War-Time on a Christian Theodicy.* By P. T. Forsyth. New York: Scribner, 1917. vi+233 pages. \$0.90.

<sup>2</sup> *Fundamental Questions.* By Henry Churchill King. New York: Macmillan, 1917. vii+256 pages. \$1.50.